

This week, Holy Week, began on Sunday, which is both Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday. By saying Palm Sunday, we mean the commemoration of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, the Holy City. And what an entrance it was—with an impromptu path of cloaks, shouting, laughing, and waving the palm branches. It was a time of happiness.

Yet, the church also calls the day Passion Sunday, because we commemorate Jesus' Passion—the betrayal, the capture, the unjust trial, the crucifixion, death, and burial. Lots of us got choked up and cried over such sorrowful things happening to Jesus, our beloved Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

Tonight we backtrack a little—we go back to the Thursday of the week called Holy Week. On Thursday, Jesus was still alive and well and having supper with his twelve disciples.

It must have been a difficult supper, though, a hard meal for Jesus to endure. It's hard for us to eat and socialize when we have something on our hearts and minds.

And oh yes, that was the case for Jesus. When I try to imagine how he felt, the phrase from President Johnson comes to mind—"a heavy heart." If anyone, at any time had a heavy heart and with such good reason, it had to be Jesus, that week before he died.

He even had the experience of having a traitor eat supper with the group: Judas. Again, it is very difficult to do this—to have a meal with someone plotting to do us harm. Generally, most of us would lose our appetites entirely. The food would stick in our throats.

But Jesus kept on, keeping on. He used every last minute he had to love and instruct his disciples—and since we are blessed to have these things recorded—that includes us.

Jesus did something unusual at that meal—he washed the disciples' feet. That sounds very strange to our 21st century ears, doesn't it? But in Jesus' day and age, footwashing was something offered to guests, as part of hospitality, and practicality, too. Everyone wore sandals or went barefoot, on dusty roads. We tend to notice that in the pictures of the Last Supper, if we look for all the details.

However, even though it was a custom, it was something a servant did, because it was just as unappealing a task to folks then as it is now.

I would like to share this episode from *Blue Shoe*, by Anne Lamott. A woman named Mattie phones Noah about his mother, Abby.

"So your mother's okay?" she said weakly.

"A social worker from the county is helping her out now. It turns out she has diabetes, but the kind where you can just take pills. She got food stamps, and a couple of cats've showed up. She's basically a street person, you know, a street person with a home."

"Is there anything she needs that I could drop off while I'm out there?"

"A couple of pairs of thick socks," Noah suggested. "The diabetes is bad for your feet, if you don't keep them clean, which she doesn't. If you get infections, you could lose a foot. That would be great. I mean, if you got the socks."

Mattie worked all day at the superette and her feet ached from standing, but she drove to Abby's anyway, to deliver the socks and some food Ned had put together.

Abby opened the door to her shack, peering nervously through the opening, she was trying to keep a little white kitten inside. It was two months old or so, and looked like a cheaply made Siamese. She scooped it up and let Mattie step past her. Abby had dark

bags under her eyes, a basketball of gut bulging out of her T-shirt. The T-shirt was tucked into her stretch leggings, like Tweedeldum, and she wore an old blue watch cap; it was all Mattie could do not to offer a fashion consultation. Along with the ocean and mildew, the place now smelled faintly of cat box. . .

There was plenty of milk and cheese and eggs in the cold cupboard, and several bottles of medicine on the counter by the sink, the hot plate nearby, with the kettle on top, boxes and cans of food on the shelves. Mattie put her bag of groceries on the counter, then showed Abby the socks; she told her that Noah had asked her to bring them.

The kitten threw itself at Mattie's ankles, and she got on the floor to play with it, feeling grains of cat litter under her hands. She saw that there were kerosene lamps on the counter, and a wood-burning stove with its pipe set up. Abby got on the floor beside Mattie to play with the kitten. She looked like an alien encountering such a creature for the first time, simultaneously puzzled and charmed. She held a dirty dishcloth out for it to charge and whipped it away at the last second. They played with the kitten for a while. Abby's bare feet smelled awful. They looked horrible, dirty, the nails like a tree sloth's, the toes crossing one over another.

"Put on the clean socks," Mattie said. "You've got to keep your feet clean and warm." She was so used to bossing her [own elderly] mother [wound] that it seemed only natural to order Abby around too. When she handed her a pair, she realized that it wouldn't do any good for Abby to put them on her dirty feet. They would only press the filth into her skin. Could I get a partial credit, Lord, for just bringing them out to her? Mattie wondered. Nope, said Jesus, sorry.

The bottoms of Abby's feet were caked with grime, cracked with fissures in which Mattie could see grains of cat litter. She started to imagine herself washing them, and prayed, Please, anything but that. Yet just as Abby had peeled away the paper band around the socks, Mattie heard herself to stop.

"You can't put those nice new socks on dirty feet," she said. "Let me heat some water." And by God, ten minutes later, Mattie was gently bathing one of Abby's feet in a salad bowl of warm soapy water, wiping the grim off her ankle and heel and toes with a dish towel and Ivory soap, working the cat litter out of the cracks in her sole."

Now that was a service!

It was a service. Jesus was demonstrating that being his follower, being a Christian, meant service, even lowly service.

However, as the Message version put it, there was also the concern of holiness, the kind of cleanliness of heart and soul that we all need so desperately.

We get that holiness from Jesus himself, in our baptisms, and in the forgiveness and grace he bestows upon us.

This was one of the commandments/mandates Jesus gave his disciples—serve one another. By the way the m-a-n-d part of those words is where we get the term Maundy, like in Maundy Thursday.

There was yet another mandate Jesus gave that night, and we do well to remember and keep it, also.

"Love one another. In the same way I loved you, love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other."

Those were Jesus' final marching orders, to his disciples then and now and all the time in between—"Serve and love."

They fit well together, and oh, how beautifully!

That's what Jesus wants of us—service and love. That's how Jesus want us to be identified—
“My what kind and loving and helpful people. They must be Christians!”

It's my hope that we will live up to this.

We must live up to this. We must follow Jesus' commands, for we belong to him, we are Jesus' people.

And he died for us. He endured the very worst that we might have forgiveness and salvation and eternal life.

So in return we accept this salvation—that's the “Savior” part of Jesus, and we let him be in charge of us, that's his “Lord” part.

May we be faithful to our Lord and Savior in Christian service and in Christian love.

Amen.

(by Rev. Sally J. DeMasters)